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**WISCONSIN CHILD  
SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT ASSOCIATION**


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**Memorandum**

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**TO** : Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice

**FROM** : Janet Nelson, Chief Legal Counsel, Milwaukee County Department  
of Child Support Enforcement, and Legislative Committee Chair,  
Wisconsin Child Support Enforcement Association 

**DATE** : October 16, 2007

**SUBJECT** : Support for Assembly Bill 269, relating to threats against child  
support workers

The Wisconsin Child Support Enforcement Association represents Wisconsin's county and tribal child support agencies. These public agencies establish paternity and establish and enforce child support orders for Wisconsin's families. The Milwaukee County Department of Child Support Enforcement is one of these agencies, and works with the Association to support legislation that allows our workers to provide the best service possible to the families who rely on our support collection efforts.

Support workers frequently see citizens at their worst – when they are involved in the emotional upheaval of separation, divorce or paternity proceedings. Unfortunately, collecting support money from individuals in these circumstances sometimes subjects workers to verbal threats of physical harm. In Milwaukee County, we receive a threat by telephone, in office meetings with caseworkers, in court or by mail a couple of times per year.

In preparing this memorandum, I reviewed a tape of threats made in 2003 by an individual upset about his support order. He called several workers within my department and left messages for each of them. In the messages, he references the shooting of a deputy in Waukesha County during the 1990's. He says he knows how to bring gasoline and matches through the security checkpoints in the Milwaukee County Courthouse and how to find where individual child support workers live by checking ownership records in the Register of Deeds.

The District Attorney charged this person under Chapter 947, Crimes Against Public Peace, Order and Other Interests. The specific charge was disorderly conduct under §947.01, a Class B misdemeanor with a penalty of imprisonment up to 90 days, a fine not to exceed \$1,000, or both. On June 4, 2007, the individual pled guilty. He was sentenced to thirty days in the Milwaukee County House of Correction, and fined \$100.

AB 269 creates a specific crime under Chapter 940 – Crimes Against Life and Bodily Security, for threatening child support and other public workers. Such threats constitute Class A misdemeanors, with a penalty imprisonment up to 9 months, a fine not to exceed \$10,000, or both. A disorderly conduct charge for threats as personal and malicious in nature as the ones I heard on the 2003 tape is inadequate. AB 269 makes it clear to child support system participants that this type of intimidation is not acceptable.

This bill joins prior legislative initiatives in Chapter 940 protecting state employees in the departments of revenue, commerce and workforce development. It is interesting to note that the earlier statutes, §940.205 and §940.207, make it a Class H felony to threaten state workers in DOR, DWD and Commerce, while threatening the workers listed in SB 269 is only a Class A misdemeanor. The difference in potential penalties is significant, as the penalty for a Class H felony can be imprisonment up to 6 years. As a result, the potential fiscal impact of AB 269 on the corrections system is less than that of those earlier laws.

Attached are reports from other counties regarding threats they have received while doing child support work, for your information.

I urge you, on behalf of the WCSEA and Milwaukee County Department of Child Support Enforcement, to support this legislation protecting child support and other public employees from unwarranted and counterproductive intimidation.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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Milwaukee County  
Department of Child Support Enforcement  
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Colleen Johnson  
Clark County Child Support Agency, Director

I am the director of the Clark County Child Support Agency. We have had sufficient threats that we now have a procedure set up. When a worker or the agency in general has been threatened we complete an incident report, and send it to the Sheriff's Department where it is filed as a complaint.

In one case the non-custodial parent called the worker and told her he was going to "do an Oklahoma on us".

In another case the payer lives in Florida but is from this area and comes back for visits. He called the worker a number of times threatening to kill her and others in the office. He was using a lot of profanity, called the worker "babycakes" and told her she had better have this fixed by Friday or she would be dead.

In yet another case the payer came in with his present wife. They were quite belligerent so I went out to talk to them myself. The wife was stomping her feet and screaming "you f.....g b...tch" at me. The payer asked me to come out to the waiting area, that he doesn't like to talk through glass and assured me he wouldn't hurt me. We had already seen Sheriff's deputies escorting him out of Community Services months prior to this. Months later we saw Sheriff's deputies escorting his wife out of court and out of the courthouse.

In another instance where the payer is a female she called the state threatening the worker in our office saying she wanted to come in and knock her out of her chair or upside the head. Staff from the state called me on that one. This payer then called our office and told the secretary that if the slot in our window was a little bigger she would come down here and rip him right through the window, and she again threatened the worker by saying she wanted to come in here and knock the worker upside the head.

A male payer called in once and told the secretary that he was going to come in here and rip his lungs out through his nose. Our secretary is a male but he does not appreciate these calls any more than the rest of us.

We have an arrangement now with the Sheriff's Dept that if we call them they will send deputies up to our office immediately.

Sincerely,

Colleen Johnson

Lisa Peck  
Calumet County CSA Manager  
206 Court Street, Chilton, WI 53014  
(920) 849-1454

I have worked in child support since November 1994. The following are incidents that stand out to me the most.

I received a call from an irate payer claiming that he was going to blow up my office. The payer knew where my office was located because he had met with me at my office previously. I had a ground level window and believed it was possible for him to throw some type of explosive device through my window. The threat came shortly after the federal building bombing in Colorado. Although I notified my supervisor at the time, nothing was done, and in fact he was allowed to walk back by himself to my office, the next day...drunk.

I attended a hearing for modification. The payer's child support was increased. No bailiff was present during that hearing. After the hearing, a bailiff was contacted because the payer was running around yelling at the acting family court commissioner, myself, and the other parent. I kept the other parent with me while the payer was advised to leave the premises. Later it was determined that the payer was stalking the payee. The payee called me and cautioned me that the payer was extremely agitated with me, the court official, and herself and that he was a stalker. He was arrested approximately one week later for aggravated rape charges that occurred in Green Bay and was also charged for a murder that occurred in North Carolina prior to our hearing.

I was meeting with a non-custodial parent and his current spouse when the NCP suddenly rose from sitting at the table. He was a very tall man, turned completely red, balled his fists, and shook from anger. He threatened to go "postal" on me.

I facilitate a group called "Stepping Up to the Plate" that focuses on providing resources to non-custodial parents so that they can better manage their own resources. Many times these individuals are incarcerated. Because it is a two-hour course, I take these individuals outside for a smoke break. One particular gentleman hovered over me, pointing, shaking his fists, demanding to know who the hell the judge or myself thought we were to determine anything about his life or that of his child's. He has been arrested for domestic violence and sexual assault in the past. He has very clearly stated that the mother will end up dead if she continues to mess with him. During this episode, the payer came within an inch (literally) of striking me. He so intimidated the other members of the group that they backed up against the wall and hung their heads in shame.

My parents recently alerted me to an article in the January 8, 2004, *Traverse City Record Eagle* (Traverse City, MI) regarding a Friend of the Court (our CSA equivalent) worker being attacked by a payer, who then attacked an attorney attempting to assist the worker, and then attacked a police officer called to the scene.

Most inmates quickly learn where I live from word of mouth by other inmates. I reside very close to the courthouse and have since purchased a very, very large black dog to dissuade

potential intruders. All staff in our office have taken self-defense training provided by our Sheriff's department because I believe the potential for violence against child support workers is very, very real.

I am only one worker with five examples. Hopefully all child support workers do not have five of their own examples. I could see how the number of examples would increase exponentially. I hope these examples are of some use to you!

Sincerely,

Lisa Peck

Mary L Paquette  
Senior Child Support Investigator  
Douglas County, WI.  
(715) 395-1250

I have been in this job as a child support investigator in Douglas County for over 22 years. I'm happy to see someone is now paying attention to the fact that this job can be dangerous.

To write down every threat that I have received over the years would take too much time but I'll try to give you a quick summary of what has taken place over the years.

I have had bricks thrown through my windows at home, and through the back windshield of my car. I have had my tires slashed. I have had threatening phone calls in the middle of the night with the caller telling me he knew my address and the fact that I was alone in the house. I have had a very angry payer leave my office and go home to kill his daughter and himself. I had a case where the payer shot and killed his first wife in Minnesota and then, after being sentenced, harassed the mother of his other child and myself, as there were still arrears owing here on his case.

In spite of being a relatively small county, we have a large caseload due to our border link to Duluth, MN, which also houses a federal prison.

Threats of violence are not limited to only us but to our friends and families also. Over the holidays, I was at two wedding receptions in Superior when I was verbally assaulted by two different persons who created disturbances. I felt embarrassed that because of what I do, someone's wedding day may have been ruined. My boyfriend, family, and friends have had to "rescue" me on many occasions when I have been confronted on child support issues, by male or female clients, ex-wives, ex-husbands, current wives or husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends, etc.

I have had situations in the past where law enforcement officers, who were clients, would stop me, with sirens blaring, to yell at me about their case. I have had county board members confront me in public and private places because they had issues with their cases or spouses or children's cases. I have relatives that still harbor resentment about their cases, and I wasn't even their worker!! I have been told in detail how I would have a slow death in a dark alley. I don't go to shopping malls or stores at normal hours to avoid confrontations in public and my home phone number is unlisted.

I could spend hours on this subject. We are law enforcement workers. We are paid to enforce laws. Child support is one of the issues, but putting a lien on someone's vehicle or property or bank account or taking their license away, can add more anger to an already stressful situation.

I've always said we are an equal hate opportunity profession. One party hates us for not getting enough money, and one party hates us for making them pay too much.

The majority of my caseload consists of responsible mothers and fathers who do not fall into the above categories, and that keeps me going. I believe in this system. It may not always be fair to one side or the other but in most cases it works.

We have our share of people who enter our office under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Add the volatile subject of child support or paternity to that issue, and the two don't mix well. They are often arrested in our offices under warrants obtained from the courts at our request.

About 15 years ago, I was confronted by a co-worker from another office in the courthouse about her own issues on her child support case. She made the comment that we were only out to ruin people's lives. The next day she brought me in a newspaper article that three child support officers were killed when an angry client stormed their office. She apologized but the fact remained the same.

Thank you for bringing this issue to the foreground. I will continue to do my job, praying that the threats remain just that, threats.

Sincerely,

Mary L Paquette

Stacee Schuck  
Child Support Supervisor  
Jefferson County Child Support Agency  
320 S. Main St., Jefferson WI 53549  
(920) 674-7259

This letter is providing you with stories and scenarios that have happened in our agency.

- 1) A case participant was sitting in a chair across the desk from his caseworker. The participant got extremely angry, screamed and lunged at the worker. Deputies were called and disorderly conduct charges were filed.
- 2) A case participant in the courthouse followed a worker to the bathroom and waited outside. He then followed the worker to her vehicle, and followed her to the grocery store. He followed her into store, and then followed her as she left to go home. The worker was able to lose the participant before reaching her home.
- 3) A worker was followed to the courthouse parking lot by a case participant who told her "now I know which vehicle is yours" in threatening manner.
- 4) A case participant threatened one of our workers with "you'd better watch your back".
- 5) A case participant upset about a tax intercept called the office and informed the child support worker that he will be coming in to pay the money and that he is a police officer and licensed to carry a gun. Sheriff's department was notified and he was given an escort to the agency when he made his payment.
- 6) A case participant threatened one of our workers with "I have a gun, and I do not know who it will be used on, you or me".

I hope that this information is helpful, and if you have any questions please let me know.

Sincerely,

Stacee Schuck



Becky Dalberg  
Richland Co. Child Support Agency  
PO Box 541, Richland Center, WI 53581  
608-647-8291

I have been working in child support either in the Clerk of Court Office or now in the Child Support Agency since 1985.

I have been threatened probably five times over these 19 years. Luckily they never followed through.

These were all from men that were ordered to pay child support and for some reason or another felt that they did not have to abide by the orders from the court. They came into the office to vent their anger on someone and since I was the keeper of their financial records, I got it. The whole matter didn't have anything to do with me; I was the object where they were placing their anger. Once I was able to determine just what the problem was, these encounters passed, and from 2 of the 5 I received apologies. Basically, they did not understand what the papers said and, once the matter was explained to them in a way they could understand, life was much better.

The one who was going to kill me...I avoided and alerted the other office workers to call the officers when he would present himself in the office again. Amazingly, the mere presence of an officer dispels the violent behavior, or the bullying behavior of the individual.

Sincerely,

Becky Dalberg

Kathy DeGrave  
Administrative Assistant/Caseworker  
Florence County Child Support Agency  
[kdegrave@florencewi.net](mailto:kdegrave@florencewi.net)

There was a case two years ago where I turned a man in for perjury in a child support case. Threats were made against my safety, and although not direct threats, I received them second and third hand from others that spoke with the man. Knowing this man, I felt very threatened and actually spoke to my family to be extra cautious as I felt he would take retribution on my testifying against him.

Also, one other case where we actually called the sheriff's department for assistance--a man came into the office screaming obscenities, yelling we were trying to ruin him and making a terrible fit concerning his case. He implied that he could take us all out - our office has very limited exit access and he was blocking us in. We have since then installed a "silent alarm" that sends a message to the Clerk of Courts for help.

Sincerely,

Kathy DeGrave

Dennis Arras  
Douglas County Child Support Agency, Director  
[dennis.arras@douglascountywi.org](mailto:dennis.arras@douglascountywi.org)

I have been director for 27 of the last 28 soon to be 29 years of the Douglas County Child Support Agency. I have supported licensing or certification since the idea was floated around. I absolutely support protective service for investigative staff, which I believe would/could follow certification. I have had threats made to me in grocery stores, bars, restaurants, etc. My life has been threatened numerous times. My wife was told to leave our home with my children because a man was coming to kill me and whoever was in the house with me. My car has been vandalized several times with keying, smashed windows and slashed tires. That even happened after I sold the car to the buyer. My house front porch was set on fire and my car, my son's car and our house has been "egged" several times. I was even attacked by a man while I was watching my 5 year old in a ride at the County Fair.

Child support workers in Ohio and California have been killed by angry payers right in the CSA offices. Some of my staff, in fact, most of my staff, have had dangerous confrontations with clients in public places. I have each investigative staff carry a company cell for security purposes; they have badges, I.D. ing themselves as county agents.

I am supportive of licensing/certifying investigative staff and getting them protective status; it won't help old-timers like myself, but in this violence-prone world we live in, it would be a very good idea for the future. I like the idea of licensing/certification because it would require continuing education and financing the same, which is not the way it goes now with cost-cutting for "non-certification" positions at the county level.

I sincerely hope you are successful in your efforts to criminalize threats to state/county workers.

Sincerely,

Dennis Arras

